

Review: Harald Welzer: Klimakriege. Wofür im 21. Jahrhundert getötet wird

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Harald Welzer: Klimakriege. Wofür im 21. Jahrhundert getötet wird

Reviewed by Adrian Schell

Harald Welzer presents his book called *Climate Wars. What is Worth Killing for in the 21st Century* (only available in German) on the consequences of climate change, the content of which differs from most literature in this area. Welzer examines and describes the potential for social conflict, which arises from climate change as well as the resulting after-effects including natural disasters, resources shortages and migration flows.

Welzer approaches the topics of climate change and violence in several stages. He writes about the holocaust, the genocide during Rwanda's civil war and the crisis in Darfur. In parts, the author does not manage to explicitly clarify the coherence between the respective chapters and the title of the book. For example, he dedicates a detailed chapter to terrorism (Red Army Faction, Al-Qaeda, etc.), just to end it by asserting that there was merely an indirect connection between terrorism and climate change. Some chapters include facts which were already discussed extensively in preceding sections of the book. During these sections the reading pleasure is limited, because it is not obvious how the reader should gain additional knowledge from these parts. More careful editing of content would not have done any harm to the book.

Despite those few weak points, Welzer's book is worth reading. He depicts clearly in which way climate change causes and accelerates the decay of statehood in wide swaths of the Third World leading to the emergence of force based economies. All players involved in conflicts in force-based economies have a common interest in ensuring such disputes continue since they are set to profit from it and thus foster their persistence. According to Welzer, civil war, originally a state of emergency, will become normality in many developing countries. As an example, Welzer mentions the crisis in Darfur which he regards as a forerunner to future conflicts, conditioned by climate change. The consequences of climate change, such as aridity, flooding and desertification, result in the agricultural sectors



of many regions being unable to sustain the local population. Hence, taking part in the force-based economy appears as a rational option to those farmers who originally lived of subsistence agriculture.

The players in force-based economies in the Southern hemisphere act, as far as they do so in reaction to the consequences of climate change, under circumstances which were set by the industrial nations of the North. The causes of climate change and the resulting after-effects were triggered by industrial nations. Welzer clearly points to fact that those actors who caused climate change will not – or at least not in the beginning – be among those who will be affected by the negative outcomes of climate change. In contrast, those whose living conditions are worst affected are much less responsible for climate change and unlike those who caused it lack the means to adapt to the aftermaths. Therefore it is little surprising, that there are flows of migration from South to North that will gain momentum in the future, because those regions, affected by the consequences of climate change, are not capable of providing sufficient means for survival. The North, which initially would even profit from

moderate global warming, will consequently become the destination of choice for climate change refugees from the South. In addition, Welzer portrays the already existing counteractive measures of the European Union and the USA, which aim at detaining climate refugees before they reach their territory, e.g. by enlisting the assistance of 'third states' like Morocco and Lybia, without really being interested in the means they resort to in order to dam up the flow of migration.

The end of the book is comprised of two chapters. In one, Welzer depicts an optimistic scenario of prospective development in which the outcomes of climate change can be mitigated by a process of social rethinking in the North. In the other, Welzer delineates the pessimistic version in which the after-effects are not mitigated effectively because industrial nations are not able to develop a new cultural and economic model in the short time left. Should this version come true, even the decay of societies or the downfall of mankind becomes imaginable. While reading the final chapter it becomes clear that Welzer regards the pessimistic version as more realistic (its headline is *Optimism is a lack of information*) and probably only added the optimistic version as a glimmer of hope. The lack of conviction, which can be observed while reading the optimistic variant, makes this final chapter a less worthwhile read as one notices that Welzer is not really invested in this version.

To conclude, reading the book is quite worthwhile because it deals with the social consequences of climate change in a well-informed and intensive in-depth manner by dramatically highlighting the social aftermaths of global warming.

Harald Welzer (2008): *Klimakriege. Wofür im 21. Jahrhundert getötet wird*. Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer. 300 pages. ISBN: 3100894332. Price: 19.90 €.